

# Listen

## A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

O C T O B E R 2 0 1 1

V O L 5 : I S S U E 4

### CULTIVATING VITALITY

There's an essential element in us—each of us—that is worthy of praise, hope, belonging, a future. For a variety of reasons and circumstances, many people in our world do not believe or see this current ontological reality. I wonder why. And some days, I wonder why I too lose vitality, and experience muddy dullness when I move through minutes and hours, days, and even weeks of precious life.

A reason comes to mind: neglect. How often do we embrace ourselves and others with compassion, emotional availability, creativity, focused attention, and time? Are we tending to the basics of sleep, healthy food, water, physical movement? How present are we to the person next to us, an animating life spark, and the land where our feet traverse? These are fundamental questions and can be healthy conversation starters with a spiritual guide.

Contemplative practice is an essential remedy for dullness and neglect. Monks describe the necessity of *wasting time deliberately*. Author and entrepreneur Seth Godin echoes this sentiment when he writes, "Wasting time is not a waste. In fact, wasting time is a key part of our lives. Wasting time poorly is a sin, because not only are you forgoing the productivity, generosity and art that comes from work, but you're also giving up the downtime, experimentation and joy that comes from wasting time."



Snowy Egret—*Egretta thula*

Think of the word *desert*. What is evoked in you? Images of sand, vivid light, confrontation with essentials, hidden compulsions, and veiled beauty greet me. Additionally, *desert* evokes the action of running away, abandonment. Desert and waste are peculiar words that serve a purpose. Both hold negative connotations, and simultaneously, both are building blocks for vital life. Our spiritual practice leads us to be gentle with polarities, holding life—and ourselves—light-heartedly and with tenderness. Contemplative practice helps us learn what to let go of, and turn away from. Going to the desert, wasting time, or making a retreat is valuable. Perspective cultivates a sense of worthiness, adventure, hope, belonging. We find ourselves making art with our lives. Service and goodness erupt.

Moh Hardin, an *acharya* or senior teacher in the Shambhala Buddhist lineage explains, "The bodhisattva

then sets out on a journey outward, a journey of discovery, of opening to him or herself, to others, and to the larger world around us. The journey of a bodhisattva is powered by the intent to live fully with an open heart and mind for the benefit of all beings."

Will you join me to make a commitment to *waste time deliberately* and live with a generous heart? Neglect leads to burn-out, compassion fatigue, addiction, disconnect, violence, and entanglement. Wasting time deliberately through leisure, prayer, silence, and service cultivates joy, creativity, presence, and availability. A spiritual director is a treasured companion, especially when we respond to the ancient call: "So I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart" (Hosea 2:19). Let's waste time—creatively, and deliberately! 🍃

—Pegge Erkeneff

#### SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- 🍃 Field Guide: Life is Sacred: a Response to Mary Oliver
- 🍃 Field Notes: What is Spiritual Direction?
- 🍃 Poetry: Listen To Me
- 🍃 Book Review: *The Artist's Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom*
- 🍃 Global Resources
- 🍃 Ask Owl

## Life is Sacred: a Response to Mary Oliver

You ask, Mary, what I plan to do  
with my one wild and precious life?  
I have learned, from my study of Proverbs (3:1-12)  
that I can only know God in accord  
with what I discover in my own heart.  
So my research takes place  
in my silent, secret chambers.  
I always thought, Mary, that there would be one  
answer to your question, that if I studied my heart  
long enough, God would reveal the purpose  
of my life to me.  
Alas, I must confess that I have not been  
successful, despite being a diligent student  
for over thirty-five years.  
I do not have an answer to your question.  
I have gleaned, however, a clue or two:  
I know that my life is sacred,  
for the God in my heart  
is related, by spirit, by life,  
to the God in yours, to the God in all others,  
to the God in all of life. Ad infinitum.  
Thus I know that I must behave towards you,  
towards all others, towards all of life,  
with honour. Ad infinitum.  
You ask, Mary, what I mean when I say  
my life is sacred?  
I don't really know, Mary,  
for words are poor substitutes  
for what the heart can tell.  
But I think that I mean that life  
is wild and precious  
and needs to be approached  
with eyes and heart wide open.

I told my husband, that at  
nearly sixty-eight, I know increasingly  
that my life is sacred.  
God bless the man for his blunt  
realism. *I don't know what you mean.*

First we had to dance past  
his thinking that I had said I was special.  
*No, I said softly, life is sacred. I just know this  
more all the time.*  
He scratched his beard.  
*I still don't know what you mean.*  
I scrambled for words to articulate  
the ineffable.  
*All life is entitled to reverence and respect,*  
I fumbled.  
*I understand the words, he said kindly,*  
*but what does this look like?*

How do I find the words, Mary, to describe  
the imperative to keep pausing to listen  
to the Beat of Life, which pulses  
in my heart  
and is evident, when I really look,  
evident everywhere?  
Let me give you just one example, Mary:  
the reverence I feel, for instance,  
when I watch a pelican dive-bomb  
the Gulf of Mexico in search of breakfast.  
Being transfixed as I count that pelican's  
thirteen successful ocean plunges.  
My sorrow for the thirteen tiny fish  
sacrificing their lives, gullet descending,  
to the big bird's hunger.  
Just one example; I cannot find the words, Mary  
to explain what I mean when I say  
that my life is sacred.  
All I can know is the breath of air  
on my cheeks,  
the shush-shush of the ocean,  
and the reverence and respect in my heart  
for the wild and precious  
bird and fish.

—Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann [Ontario, Canada]

### CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

#### Ponder

“How do I find the words, Mary, to describe / the  
imperative to keep pausing to listen / to the Beat of Life,  
which pulses / in my heart / and is evident, when I really  
look, / evident everywhere?”

—Note: Mary Oliver is a Pulitzer Prize winning poet who lives in  
Massachusetts, USA.

#### Expression

Respond to your inner sensations, feelings, or thoughts  
in any manner that appeals to you. You could dance,  
walk, paint, sing, laugh, write, draw, plant, speak, play,  
cry, be still, cook, call a friend—whatever moves you.

Give evidence to your breath, then give thanks. 



## WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

### Reflections from Different Spiritual Traditions

**S**piritual direction is the contemplative practice of helping another person or group to awaken to the mystery called God in all of life, and to respond to that discovery in a growing relationship of freedom and commitment. —*James Keegan, SJ, Roman Catholic*

Spiritual direction can mean different things to different people. Some people understand it to be the art of listening carried out in the context of a trusting relationship. It is when one person is trained to be a competent guide who then *companions* another person, listening to that person's life story with an ear for the movement of the Holy, of the Divine. —*Rev. Jeffrey S. Gaines, Presbyterian*

The object of spiritual direction is to cultivate one's ability to discern God's presence in one's life—to notice and appreciate moments of holiness, to maintain an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, to explore ways to be open to the Blessed Holy One in challenging and difficult moments as well as in joyful ones. The spiritual director serves as a companion and witness, someone who helps you (sometimes with questions, sometimes just by listening) to discern the divine where you might have missed it and to integrate that awareness into your daily life, your *tefillah*, your *tikkun olam* work, your study, your ritual practice. —*Rabbi Jacob Staub, Jewish*

Islam means to surrender to God in peace. The journey of surrender is the lifelong work of transforming the ego, opening the heart, and becoming conscious of God. We need to bring Divinity into the center of our lives. The guidance, inspiration, and support of a spiritual director, spiritual teacher, or spiritual friend is crucial to this process. The thirteenth century sage Rumi says that whoever travels without a guide needs two hundred years for a two-day journey. A Muslim spiritual director, teacher, or friend has abiding faith in the spiritual guidance abounding in the Qur'an, insights of the Prophet Muhammad, and teachings of Islamic sages. —*Sheikh Jamal Rahman, Muslim*

Spiritual direction is encompassed in the Buddhist student-teacher relationship; the connection between spiritual director and directee is most reminiscent of the spiritual friend relationship—known in ancient Pali as *kalyanamitta*. This sacred friendship is one in which there is a depth of connection and commitment—a joining

together through empathy and wisdom. In Buddhist spiritual direction, the director, in mindful presence, shares in a heartfelt way the feelings expressed by the directee—meeting the directee's inherent goodness—the sacred still place within. Through empathy and wisdom, the spiritual director skillfully leads the directee to know his or her inherent goodness, inspiring the directee to envision and meet his or her true potential. —*Karin J. Miles, MA, Interfaith*

Spiritual direction is the contemplative practice of accompanying (or joining with) a person or group as they awaken to the spiritual in everyday life, and it is the shared intentions and supports for the directee to have a deeper relationship with spirit through all phases of life. —*Dale Rhodes, Taoist*

To live one's life in union with the Divine and to realize the freedom of one's highest Self is the ultimate goal of the Eastern philosophy of Yoga. Spiritual direction, from the perspective of Yoga, is founded on the understanding that God lives within the hearts of each of us and of all creation. The aim of spiritual direction is the formation of a partnership between God, the spiritual directee, and the spiritual director in a holy alchemy, which lovingly upholds the directee during exploration and deepening of one's relationship with God, others, all creation, and the higher Self. Through deep listening, powerful questions, and reflection of the thoughts and feelings conveyed by the directee, spiritual direction provides an opportunity to regularly reflect on life's events and circumstances from a spiritual perspective. —*Donna Woods, Philosophy of Yoga*

Spiritual guidance is being present in the moment, seeing and honoring the sacred mystery of the soul of another. It is witnessing this mystery and reflecting it back in word, prayer, thought, presence, and action. Spiritual guidance is modeling a deep relationship with the Divine and standing in faith and love with the other as that relationship unfolds. Spiritual guidance is a journey of deep healing and an affirmation of Holiness (wholeness), the Sacred, and the Mystery of all of life. —*Carol A. Fournier, MS, NCC, Interfaith*

To read more descriptions of spiritual direction, or to share your spiritual tradition, go to [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org).







## Listen To Me

Listen to me for a day, an hour, even a moment  
Before my very soul becomes  
twisted and bent.

Listen to me in my terrible wilderness,  
in my aching distress,  
in my lonely silence.

Dear God, is there no one to listen?

Is there no one to listen with compassion, with sympathetic ear?  
to allay my rampant fear?

Is there no one to listen, you ask?

O yes indeed there is one,  
one who always listens without condemnation.

He waits at the entrance of your soul's station,  
to your eternal soul he is known.

He waits, and waits for you alone.

—Robert Gresak [Queensburgh, South Africa]

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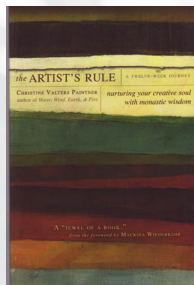
## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual direction explores a deeper relationship with  
the spiritual aspect of being human. Simply put, spiri-  
tual direction is helping people tell their sacred stories  
everyday. Descriptions of a spiritual guidance relation-  
ship include *Anam Cara*, spiritual accompaniment,

spiritual companionship, spiritual direction, spiritual  
guidance, spiritual mentoring, sacred friendship, and  
soul friendship. How would you describe a relationship  
with another person—or group—that listens deeply to  
you, and receives *your* sacred life story?



# REVIEW



***The Artist's Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom***

**by Christine Valters Paintner**

Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2011

173 pages, CAD\$14.67, GBPE10.99, USD\$15.95

Reviewed by Catherine Grytting

During childhood, after several viewings of “The Wizard of Oz,” I knew the story by heart. Nevertheless, the movie surprised me when I first watched it in color. The scenes in Kansas, USA, are filmed in black and white. When Dorothy drops into Oz, reds, yellows, and greens burst onto the screen and welcome the viewer to this new world.

Christine Valters Paintner’s fifth book evokes a similar experience. In *The Artist’s Rule*, the familiar subjects of creativity and spirituality explode into a kaleidoscope of connections that invite the reader into the borderland where these topics converge. Grounded in scholarly knowledge, the book quotes Scriptures, theologians, mystics, psychologists, artists, poets, and others. Yet it reads like a stimulating conversation with a soul friend.

Paintner is a Benedictine Oblate. She commits to living the prayer and spirituality of the Benedictine religious order in her daily life circumstances as a wife, artist, writer, and teacher. The book “began as an online course called *Way of the Monk, Path of the Artist*” (3). It maps a twelve-week journey that blends sparkling elements of creativity with rich values of spirituality. The bones of the book are Benedictine practices such as contemplation, praying the hours, obedience, humility, hospitality, community, asceticism and service. Paintner fleshes out the content with teachings from early Christian desert fathers and mothers, insights from Celtic and Cherokee traditions, and the intelligence of the Earth’s seasons.

After discussing contemporary perspectives on ancient wisdom, each chapter offers contemplative practices that include questions for reflection and a reading to

ponder through *lectio divina*. Then Paintner presents two creative explorations, generally using visual and written forms, with some opportunities for movement. Rather than focusing on artistic products, the exercises foster transformation. Paintner encourages the reader to “give yourself permission to make ‘bad’ art. By ‘bad,’ I simply mean art that is purely for self-exploration ... and for honoring the beauty found in truthfulness” (103). Yet sometimes, artistic play uncovers the splendor that dwells in our sacred depths. Poetic gems from participants in the online class shimmer at the end of every chapter. The structure of each creative activity provides support for timid novices while launching bold practitioners.

Written for those interested in spirituality and creativity, Paintner’s book speaks to spiritual direction by cultivating awareness of “the sacred presence beating through the heart of the world” (16). Readers can enjoy the book from cover-to-cover, or by engaging with random excerpts. They can be successful alone or as individuals in a group. Spiritual directors might apply this book to their own deepening or recommend it as a resource for spiritual directees.

I enjoyed *The Artist’s Rule*. The content carried me over the rainbow to the place where “the monk and the artist are one” (161). Even after creating times ended, they continued to nourish me. I believe they will for you, too. 🍀

—Dr. Catherine Grytting is a spiritual director, healer, teacher, musician, artist, and writer. In addition she offers classes in energy healing. She lives in Washington, USA. Contact her at [info@CatherineGrytting.com](mailto:info@CatherineGrytting.com).

*Listen*

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W W W . S D I W O R L D . O R G

*Listen* is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the SDI website at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org), you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions,

and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org). 🍀



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# ASK OWL



**Q**uestion: I'm seeking a spiritual director, and I noticed the Spiritual Directors International website suggests I should "interview" at least two or three people. Interview seems like an odd

word to use in this context. And why would I want to talk to more than one person?

**H**oot Hoot: Thank you for your valuable questions! First, when you imagine yourself interviewing a potential spiritual director or guide it might be helpful to think in terms of a conversation—the interview is a time to ask questions, dialogue, and listen. Your initial interview offers you the ability to assess, discern, and take a next step. A relationship with your spiritual director or guide is a confidential, significant, and often cherished relationship. You and the person you ask to accompany you will prayerfully discern if meeting together has the potential to be a good match. So, the initial conversation or interview is important! If after the interview you both determine that you will begin to meet on an ongoing basis, it is valuable to mutually assess the relationship every three to six months.

Why is it important to interview at least two or three people? Finding a spiritual director is a very personal and spiritual quest. Conversing with at least two people will give you a sense of personality and style differences. You will want to talk about what draws you to spiritual direction during this time in your life and notice how comfortable it is for you to tell your faith story or spiritual journey. You will not share your entire sacred story, struggles, or joys during this first conversation. Ethically, a spiritual director will want you to be free to leave the initial interview and never talk or meet again.

It is up to you to take reasonable steps to verify the competency of any potential spiritual director. As a ministry of care in many nations and many faiths, in retreat centers, hospitals, and even the work place, spiritual direction does not have a centralized certifying body that verifies qualifications of spiritual directors. Faith traditions may view the role of a spiritual director differently. Some valuable questions to talk about when you meet with a potential spiritual guide include:

- What enrichment, spiritual formation, and theological education do you have in spiritual direction?
- What is your personal experience tending your own prayer, meditation, and contemplative life?

• What is your experience as a spiritual director? How many years? In what environments? What are you most interested in spiritually?

• How do you continue your education and remain accountable, often through supervision for your spiritual direction ministry?

• What ethical guidelines do you abide by, such as those published by Spiritual Directors International?

• What type of engagement agreement will we establish to clarify roles and responsibilities in our spiritual direction relationship? (Samples are provided at Spiritual Directors International, [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org).)

Interviewing a potential spiritual director is a care-filled way to listen to how you are being guided by God or Ultimate Reality in your selection process. Questions for your personal reflection as you seek a spiritual guide are on the Spiritual Directors International website. Remember, it is up to you to choose your spiritual director wisely. Hoot hoot! 🦉

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail [Listen@sdiworld.org](mailto:Listen@sdiworld.org).



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"Tending the holy around the world and across traditions ...

Al servicio de lo sacro alrededor del mundo y a través de las tradiciones ..."

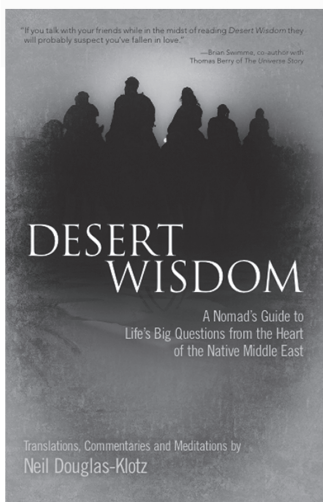
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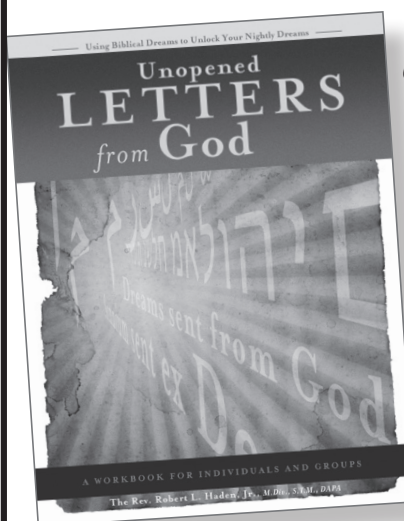
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